

Iowa Outdoors
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.com

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20,000 ANTLERLESS ONLY DEER PERMITS REMAIN

DES MOINES - Deer hunters planning for the two shotgun seasons are encouraged to purchase an antlerless only permit along with their any deer tag. Permits remain in the high deer population areas of southern and northeast Iowa.

“We have had a good response from hunters, but we still have a high number of antlerless permits available in southern and northeast Iowa counties. Unfortunately, that is exactly where the deer herd is the largest,” said Richard Bishop, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wildlife bureau.

Bow and early muzzleloader hunters purchased a record number of antlerless licenses and the DNR is hoping shotgun hunters do the same. First season shotgun hunters may purchase an antlerless license, in addition to their any deer permit, for the first shotgun season.

“Now we need the shotgun hunters to help us out,” Bishop said. “The only way to reduce the deer herd is for hunters to take more does, and the antlerless permits are the way to do that.”

The first antlerless deer only permit costs \$26. Each antlerless permit after the first costs only \$11. Hunters can donate extra deer to a locker participating in the Help Us Stop Hunger (HUSH) program at no cost. Participating lockers are listed on the internet at www.iowahush.com. Hunters can also donate \$5 to HUSH each time they purchase a deer permit.

“Our permit sales are set up to allow hunters to harvest a doe, while waiting for the trophy buck to come along,” Bishop said. “If hunters don’t have the opportunity for that trophy, they still have venison from the doe.”

The DNR has a list of license sales by county, and how many licenses remain on [its website](#). Click on the wildlife link on the navigation bar, then on the link “Iowa Resident Antlerless Licenses Remaining”.

For more information, contact Little at 515-281-8660.

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MISSISSIPPI RIVER TAILWATER FISHING RESTRICTED

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

On a cold winter day, they are as reliable as the eagles that float overhead. If there is open water below a Mississippi River lock and dam, boats—sometimes dozens of them—bob in the choppy current. On board, bundled up anglers from all over eastern Iowa, western Illinois and Wisconsin are looking for sauger and walleye in the deep tailwaters.

There are plenty of them. The deep, rocky shelves are thick with the popular game fish. Exciting to catch, beautiful to look at--and delicious to eat—saugers, their walleye cousins and hybrid saugeyes are the fish of choice when ice grips the rest of The River.

And therein lies the problem. We’ve gotten too good at catching them. Even with anglers practicing good catch and release techniques, sauger mortality has zoomed to 80 percent over the last few years. That’s why three popular tailwater areas will be closed to winter fishing, over the next five years.

“As those sauger come up from the deep water (30 to 60 feet or more), their air bladders expand,” says Department of Natural Resources fisheries research biologist John Pitlo, describing how the drastic change in pressure forces the thin membranes out of saugers’ mouths or gills. Pitlo and his crew at the Bellevue research station survey sauger and walleye numbers every fall. “If I have 100 saugers, one year old, then with 80 percent mortality, I’ll have only 20 a year later. The next year, 16 of *those* 20 will be gone. By the time they are four years old—I have one. There just aren’t any large fish remaining in the four to five year range.”

That’s why Pitlo recommended—and the Iowa Natural Resource Commission approved—closing tailwater fishing below the lock and dam at Dubuque, Bellevue and

Clinton. The tailwater closing, and several other fishing regulation changes, must still be approved by the Legislative Review committee. If that final hurdle is cleared, the closure takes effect Jan. 1, 2004. Though it omits December *this* year, the closed season would be from December 1 through March 15, for the next five years. The new regulations affect fishing just below the dam. If open water extends downstream, anglers can work wing dams and other habitat.

“I have no real problem with it,” conceded Art Hurlburt. The Dubuque fisherman and two partners had a live well with a half dozen nice 13 to 15 inch saugers, as I caught them pulling out of the Bellevue ramp a few days ago. “When you have really nice weather, though, you just want to be out there. But we ice fish, too. I suppose we’ll do more ice fishing.” Hurlburt said he would also prefer a length limit on saugers. “We have a self imposed 13-inch rule. We see guys taking saugers out of here that are only nine, ten inches long.”

That’s the attitude that Pitlo and other DNR biologists have heard on the water and at boat ramps over the last couple years and at three public hearings this fall. “Most of them were highly supportive. They’ve seen their sauger fishing decline since the middle ‘90s. Many of them thought it was about time we did something,” notes Pitlo. Creel surveys documented the decline.

Originally, the proposal was for all tailwaters on the Mississippi. Instead, Dubuque, Bellevue and Clinton will be compared to Guttenberg, the Quad Cities and other river fisheries, to see whether a trend develops. An interesting twist appeared in population surveys this fall. “We actually saw some 17, 18 inch saugers for the first time in years. We can tie that right back to 2000-2001, when we had lots of snow and thick ice,” Pitlo points out. “There was simply no tailwater fishing from December until mid March that winter. Our overall mortality rate that year dropped to (an acceptable) 58 percent. That suggests we are right on track (with the winter restrictions).”

Sidebar: Affected Tailwaters

From Dam 11 at Dubuque to State Hwy. 61/151 Bridge

From Dam 12 at Bellevue to the mouth of Mill Creek, near river mile 556.0

From Dam 13 at Clinton to the downstream end of Stamp Island near river mile 521.5.

NRC Approves Other Changes on Mississippi

Walleye: Along with the restrictions in tailwater fishing, the Iowa Natural Resource Commission (NRC) this month approved changes in walleye length limits on the Mississippi River, bag limits for certain panfish there, as well as interior stream and lake adjustments.

That includes a ‘slot’ limit on walleyes taken from pool 12 (below Dubuque) to pool 20, requiring all walleyes from 20 to 27 inches to immediately be released alive. In

addition, only one walleye over 27 inches may be kept per day, on those pools. A 15-inch walleye minimum length limit is already in place. Also, an aggregate daily bag limit of six fish is in effect for walleye, sauger and saugeye combined. The possession limit is twice that. On the Big Sioux River, the limits are four and eight, respectively.

Panfish: You'll have to count your bluegills, crappies and other sunfish on your Mississippi River fishing trips. The NRC has set a daily bag limit of 25 each for crappies, yellow perch and rock bass. An aggregate limit of 25 is in place for bluegills and pumpkinseeds and 25 for white bass and yellow bass in all Mississippi waters. Again, the possession limit is double the daily bag.

Trout: Iowa residents and nonresidents, regardless of age, must pay the Trout Fee to either **fish for**, or possess trout. Exception: Residents and nonresidents under 16 years old may fish for or possess trout without having paid the Trout Fee if they fish with a properly licensed adult who has paid the Trout Fee and together they limit their catch to the daily limit for one person.

Viking Lake: A 15-inch minimum length limit applies to walleye in Viking Lake, Montgomery County. The daily bag limit is three with a possession limit of six.

Ada Hayden Heritage Park, Story County: 18-inch minimum length limit for bass.

New license fees: Fishing license fees have also been adjusted; tying in the 'fish habitat fee' with the license cost, and setting up new, short term nonresident and resident licenses, in addition to the regular annual license.

Iowa Resident Fishing License: \$17.50

Resident 7-day: \$12

Resident 1-day: \$8

Resident Trout Fee: \$11

Nonresident Fishing License: \$39.50

Nonresident 7-day: \$30.50

Nonresident 3-day: \$16

Nonresident 1-day: \$9

Nonresident Trout Fee: \$13.50

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STATE PARK OFFICIALS RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE

DES MOINES – Three members of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources parks staff were recognized for their excellent work over the past year.

Lake Manawa State Park manager Doug Coziahr received the employee of the year, and park rangers Tom Basten, Lake Anita State Park, and Wayne Buchholtz, Mines of Spain State Recreation Area, shared the conservationist of the year.

Kevin Szcodronski, chief of the parks bureau, said Coziahr's work to encourage volunteerism at the park and securing a donation of a \$50,000 John Deere tractor from a local utility company were just a few reasons he received the prestigious award.

"Doug works extremely hard to keep one of our busiest parks in the state running smoothly," Szcodronski said. "His work at community outreach and to improve the park's appearance are impressive, to say the least."

The co-conservationists of the year were both recognized for their efforts on prairie restoration. "We usually only give one conservationist of the year award, but Wayne and Tom did so much conservation work that we decided each deserved this honor," he said.

Buchholtz has spent 8 years restoring a 270-acre field from crops, weeds and volunteer trees into prairie grasses and forbs. He also works with local schools and colleges to assist in prairie grass seed harvest and allows the students to take some seeds back to their schools to establish their own prairie.

Buchholtz works with the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) to exchange grass seeds needed for the DOT's Living Roadway Trust Fund for forbs needed at Mines of Spain.

"Wayne has made a marked difference in vegetation management at Mines of Spain, and hundreds of students have learned from his effort," Szcodronski said.

Basten secured a \$25,000 federal grant for wildlife habitat improvement earlier this year for prairie restoration at Lake Anita. He is working to convert a brome grass area into a vast prairie, in addition to restoring several savanna areas.

"Tom works hard to keep the local community and the Lake Anita friends group informed of what is going on in the park, and he has received tremendous support," Szcodronski said.

Basten will work with the DNR's local fisheries staff this winter on habitat improvements in the lake. Lake Anita is undergoing a renovation project to improve fishing.

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HUNTING INCIDENTS UP, DEER SEASON LIES AHEAD

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The call is not one a conservation officer wants to hear. 'Hunting accident; with injury'. It's one that too many officers already have heard this fall; with the late pheasant season and the busy shotgun deer seasons still lying ahead. Department of Natural Resources officers have investigated 16 hunting incidents this year, including 12 pheasant hunting mishaps, in the first two weeks of Iowa's most popular season. In each of the last two years, there were only five incidents investigated. Like virtually all incidents, investigators look back at how they could have been avoided...or at least prevented from happening again.

The most serious this season sent Ray Fisher, of Englewood, Ohio, to the hospital. He carried about 100 pellets from the back of his shoulder down to his calves. Fisher was shielded by standing corn, 40 yards away as a partner in his party of six tried to nail a running rooster. The regular officer was off that day--October 29. DNR recreational safety officer Craig Jackson of Tipton was on duty. He headed toward the scene, north of Wellman in Washington County.

"The six hunters were driving standing corn; an odd shaped field. That was part of the problem," recalls Jackson. "(Fisher) followed the curving end row around and was further out in front of the shooter than either expected. He had no blaze orange—although it probably wouldn't have been visible in that instance, anyway."

Fisher was X-rayed at University Hospitals, and released. Though not life threatening, the accident underscores the need to follow a couple safety tenets. "The people you choose to hunt with are your family and friends," stresses Rod Slings, DNR recreational safety program supervisor. "Hunting is not only a social activity, but one which requires you to make decisions. The wrong decision can result in disaster."

In the Wellman incident, as with most others, the cause is pretty obvious. The hunter pays too much attention to the game animal, and not enough to what lies beyond. "The primary cause for these injuries is a lack of muzzle control and target fixation," says Slings. Unfortunately, he notes that the rise in pheasant numbers the last couple years is indicative of the number of incidents out there. "As long as the weather remains good, there will be good numbers of hunters out there. I encourage everyone to hunt safe." Hunting standing corn is 'chancy' at best. If you are, safety officials urge you to stay in line; talk each other, make sure your hunting partners know where you are. "If you can't see...don't shoot," notes Jackson.

That caution extends into Iowa's second busiest season. More than 100,000 shotgun season deer hunters hit the woods through the first three weekends of December. Shooting single projectile slugs instead of shot, deer hunters face a higher potential of serious injury or fatality, if basic common sense is not followed. "Whether it is running

deer or flying pheasants, hunters need to stay under control as they swing on game,” stresses Jackson. “That is the number one cause of incidents every year.”

Much of Iowa’s shotgun deer hunting involves parties, spread over large areas and often out of sight of each other until they close a drive. That is when it is mandatory for ‘blockers’ and ‘drivers’ to know their responsibilities. “Have a plan for your hunt. Make sure it is a good plan. Know where your safe zones of fire are. Then hunt your plan,” says Jackson. “I have seen several poorly planned hunts that ended in incidents.”

Chief Johnson County hunter education instructor Jim Smith says the majority of younger kids taking the mandatory classes now are doing it before they head out deer hunting. “Part of the class involves watching a video—shoot/don’t shoot situations—and then asking how they would handle a particular situation. It takes awhile for them to open up, but we usually get good feedback. Then, we work from there; how their decision was the right one...or how to arrive at the right one.”

With all the suggestions, phrases, videos, pamphlets and reminders in the world, the DNR’s Jackson boils it down to four words. “Think before you shoot.”

Gun Range Work Continues

Target shooters at the Hawkeye Wildlife Area shooting range will have to practice around earthwork schedules for the next few months. By next June, though, the area along Amana Road NW in Johnson County, west of the Department of Natural Resources wildlife office and shop will feature 25, 50 and 100-yard ranges for target shooting.

Funding for the \$80,000 project comes from the Hawkeye Area’s operating budget. Contracts for the 25 and 100-yard ranges will be let in January, to be completed June 1. “Weekends will be the best bet for shooters, since we will be moving dirt when ever our schedules allow,” explains DNR wildlife management biologist Tim Thompson. Free fill dirt is available to anyone who wants to haul it out of the site. Call (319) 857-4645 for details.

The range will be fenced, to eliminate dumping of furniture, appliances and other junk. Only paper and metal silhouette targets will be allowed when the range is completed. Eventually, a short safety and shooting etiquette course will be required. “We’ll issue a card to everyone who goes through the course,” says Thompson. “That card is their admission. Each card holder can bring a friend, but if the friend wants to shoot alone, he or she will need to get a card.”

In the meantime, the nearby shotgun range is now open. The range, with 12 shooting stations, is west of Greencastle Road, on the south side of Amana Road. “We want all shotgun shooting done there now, rather than spread throughout the area,” reminds Thompson. “It is for shot shells only. There is no slug shooting allowed there.” Shooters will need to supply their own clay bird thrower.

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RESEARCH PROJECT FOCUSES ON BOBCATS IN SOUTHERN IOWA

CHARITON – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Iowa State University have joined together in a three year research project to learn more about bobcat populations and where the animals are located in an eight county area in south central Iowa.

The DNR is tagging live bobcats with radio collars in Marion, Warren, Clarke, Lucas, Monroe Decatur, Wayne and Appanoose counties. So far, the project has successfully captured and released 10 bobcats with radio collars. One bobcat was released only with a tag because it was too small for a radio collar. Cooperating local trappers have contributed six bobcats to the study. The remaining four were caught in DNR traps.

Todd Gosselink, forest wildlife research biologist with the DNR, said hunters, trappers and the general public are an important ingredient in this project.

“The general public can help us by recording bobcat sightings and by letting us know when they have accidentally caught a bobcat in a trap,” Gosselink said. The DNR will also be collecting bobcats killed on Iowa roadways.

For more information, contact Gosselink at 641-774-2958.

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